



Claire McCaskill

United States Senator

Summary Report:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Integrated Service Network 15 Medical Centers
Kansas City VA Medical Center

Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program

Report No: 2017 – KC – 06



<http://www.mccaskill.senate.gov>



Kansas City Region Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program

Since arriving in the United States Senate, Senator Claire McCaskill has made keeping our nation's promises to veterans one of her highest priorities. As the daughter of a World War II veteran, Claire knows the vital sacrifices that veterans have made for the security of our country and in defense of our core values and freedoms. In return for their service, she believes that our country owes veterans a sacred debt of gratitude, which includes access to safe, quality, reliable medical care through our U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system of hospitals and clinics, both in Missouri and across the country.

Following a series of highly-publicized incidents in 2010 which called into question the high standard of care provided by the St. Louis VA Medical Center – John Cochran Division, Claire reached out to Missouri veterans and VA administrators to address the erosion of confidence in the overall quality of care and customer service at John Cochran VA Medical Center. Although many veterans reported positive experiences with the medical care at John Cochran, concerns persisted among veterans with the customer service they received at the Center and, to a lesser extent, other VA medical facilities in Missouri. In response, Claire announced plans for a “secret shopper” program for veterans—formally named the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program—to rate the quality of service at Missouri VA facilities and to provide the VA with targeted, helpful feedback about veterans' positive and negative experiences at the VA medical centers.

Following the announcement of the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program, Claire and her staff collaborated with leaders from various Missouri veterans' organizations and VA administrators to shape the program. Through this collaboration, a constructive, confidential survey was developed that would be useful to the VA medical centers and act as an independent resource for veterans to make recommendations. The Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program acts as an independent, transparent voice for veterans. It has three major goals:

- (1) Improve communications between veterans and VA medical center personnel;
- (2) Improve overall customer service ratings of VA medical centers in Missouri; and
- (3) Improve the willingness of veterans to positively recommend Missouri VA medical facilities to other veterans.

This report represents the sixth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report for the Kansas City region facilities and includes a continuing compilation of survey data as reported directly by Missouri veterans.



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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 26, 2017

To the Director of the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center,
Members of the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and Missouri's Veterans:

I am pleased to release the results of my sixth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey for the Kansas City region. After reviewing the responses from this round of surveys, I am encouraged by the commitment of both Missouri veterans and VA officials in the Kansas City region to come together for the sake of improving veterans' experiences at VA facilities. In this sixth Summary Report, Missouri veterans indicated their strong satisfaction with the Kansas City VA medical facilities, as they reported across the board increases in every category. Since the last survey, the Kansas City VA Medical Center has shown considerable improvement in several areas, suggesting that VA staff are working hard to improve their scheduling practices and minimize wait times for veterans.

When I first proposed this "secret shopper" program, I told you that I would not be happy until Missouri's veterans are happy. I mean it as much now as I did then. Today, I am pleased that more and more veterans are telling me how the Kansas City VA has continued to improve. The report suggests veterans' experiences at the VA are generally improving across the board; however, we must be careful to avoid drawing too strong a conclusion based on the number of responses. Looking ahead, it is important that we keep the momentum growing that we have established over the last few years with the robust participation among our veterans. We must sustain this timely, transparent process to ensure our veterans are satisfied with their VA health care experience. To that end, I have instructed my staff to continue working with the veterans' organizations in executing a robust outreach strategy to promote even greater participation.

I remain appreciative of the hard work and professionalism shown by the VA administrators, employees and staff. I know they are committed, as I am, to ensuring veterans have a positive experience while at Missouri VA medical centers. It appears that the leadership at the Kansas City VA Medical Center recognize their tremendous obligation in serving Missouri's veterans, and I appreciate their commitment to responding to the concerns expressed to me in these surveys within 30 days.

Additionally, I am grateful for the help and support from my partners at the Kansas City region VA as well as several Missouri veterans' organizations. However, most importantly, I am grateful to our veterans for their service, sacrifice and support for the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program. Together we *can* and *will* improve the quality of customer care in Missouri's VA medical facilities, starting right here in Kansas City.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

The following members of my staff participated in the preparation of this report:

Corey Dillon
Nick Rawls
Allyson LeBlanc

Would you like your voice heard?

Veterans can complete a survey of their current experience at a VA facility at:
<http://mccaskill.senate.gov/vcsp/>.



REPORT

We have reviewed the responses received from the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program (VCSP) survey for the Kansas City region. The small number of survey results that we received from veterans raising specific concerns about their care or benefits were reviewed by senate office caseworkers and responded to on a case-by-case basis if casework was necessary. The scope of our review included, but was not necessarily limited to, comments received about Kansas City VA Medical Centers and its Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (collectively referred to as Kansas City VA or VA) through the period ending April 9, 2017. Comments after that period will be reviewed in the next Summary Report.

The objectives of our review were to:

- Identify specific concerns from veterans regarding the customer service received while interacting with the Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify areas where communication can be improved between veterans and the Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify criticisms impacting the overall customer service ratings of the Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify concerns that impact the willingness of veterans to positively recommend the Kansas City VA Medical Center to other veterans;
- Report the full range of responses received from the veterans regarding the Kansas City VA; and
- Issue a public report of the survey conclusions and resolutions of any identified issues.

Our methodology included reviewing responses submitted on the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program surveys, identifying any specific urgent issues and working directly with the veteran to get an immediate response from the VA and submitting other concerns identified in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program to the VA. Some of the veterans elected not to take immediate action regarding issues identified in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey.

Prior to the issuance of the report, representatives of various veterans' service organizations reviewed the Summary Report and made recommendations for suggested improvements at the VA facilities. Their comments and recommendations have been incorporated in this report.

The VA has provided responses to all recommendations.



SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) oversees the largest healthcare system in the nation through a network of 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks. Missouri is mostly comprised of Veterans Integrated Service Network 15 with a large portion of Southwestern Missouri in Veterans Integrated Service Network 16 and small portions of Northern Missouri in Veterans Integrated Service Network 23. In order for the VA to gauge the satisfaction of veterans receiving care at individual VA medical centers, the VA established the Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients in 2002. The Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients was designed to consolidate multiple VA health care survey programs into a single program that collects data on both inpatient and outpatient experiences of veterans at a VA medical center. The Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients focuses on the quality of care.

With the Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients serving as a blueprint, Claire's office, veteran leaders and the Kansas City VA Medical Center worked together to develop an independent survey to serve as a resource veterans can use to make recommendations to each individual VA medical center regarding the quality of customer service.

Scope

The scope of this review included those VA facilities located in the Kansas City region through the period ending April 9, 2017. In the Kansas City region, three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received during that period.

Information used to complete this report included:

- Completed surveys from veterans who received care at a VA facility.
- Communications with and information received from representatives from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Modern Warfare, Disabled Veterans of America, the Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations and VA officials.

Methodology

During our review, a database established by and internal to the senate office was used to accumulate results and compile data in tabulated form. In instances where veterans reported the need for immediate or urgent assistance in response to their case, additional information was gathered so the VA could respond immediately to their needs.

Survey questionnaires were available through veterans' service organizations, from VA patient representatives and online at www.mccaskill.senate.gov/vcsp. Veterans self-reported their

customer service experience at the VA facility either directly online or by submitting a written survey to a veterans' service organization or to Claire's office that was then entered into the database.

All survey responses, not including any identifying respondent information, were provided to the VA. In addition, all survey responses were reviewed independently by representatives of the veterans' service organizations. Specific comments were selected to be included in the report based on the significance and relevance of the comment to the statement. Those comments not selected for reporting were taken into consideration when writing the report but were not directly quoted due to the comments either not having as significant a level of relevance to the statement offered or missing key information to draw a conclusion.

Limitations

Data presented are compiled from survey information submitted voluntarily by veterans. The comments included were obtained directly from the surveys or from veterans' service organization representatives. These comments were not verified by the senate office through additional procedures for accuracy, validity or completeness.

This is not meant to be a scientifically-constructed study.



OBSERVATIONS & RESULTS

Background

This summary report covers the period ending April 9, 2017. During this period, three hundred sixty-eight (368) survey responses were received in the Kansas City region. In the survey, veterans reported the era that they served. All eras of veterans from World War II to present day were represented with Vietnam era veterans comprising over sixty-one percent (61.1%) of the respondents. Some veterans indicated they served in multiple eras of service. Below is a table which details the service eras of veterans participating in the survey:

WWII	1.1%
Korean War	7.1%
Vietnam War	61.1%
Desert Shield/Desert Storm	16.0%
Iraq/Afghanistan	13.0%
Other	17.9%

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their gender. Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this question. Below is a table which indicates the gender composition of respondents:

Male	90.8%
Female	9.2%

In the survey, over seventy-three percent (73.1%) of veterans indicated that they had received services at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. Some veterans visited multiple VA facilities. Below is a table which describes where the veterans received treatment:

Kansas City VA Medical Center	73.1%
Belton CBOC	3.3%
Cameron Clinic	4.6%
Excelsior Springs, MO CBOC	4.1%
Honor Annex	11.7%
Kansas City Vet Center	1.6%
Mobile Medical Unit	1.4%
Nevada CBOC	1.9%
Paola, KS CBOC	0.8%
Warrensburg Clinic	4.9%
Other	10.1%

These veterans utilized multiple services while at Kansas City region VA medical facilities. Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses indicated that veterans utilized services from the following VA clinic categories:

Primary Care	27.7%	Emergency Room	5.2%	Extended Care	1.1%
Outpatient Clinic	16.3%	Mental Health Services	9.8%	Dental	2.4%
Pharmacy	11.1%	X-Ray	5.4%	Laboratory	16.3%
Travel/Enrollment	0.8%	Main Lobby	6.0%	Specialist Visit	11.4%
Inpatient Care	4.1%	Women's Clinic	2.7%	Spinal Cord Injury Unit	0.5%
Prosthetics	2.2%	Podiatry	3.3%	Family Health (CHAMPVA)	0.3%
Claim & Pension Exam	7.1%	Other	29.6% (examples: Senior Veterans Clinic, Neurology, Cardiology)		

Review of survey question results

This section summarizes the results of each of the survey statements. Results from the most recent survey (R6) are marked “current,” and results from the previous reports (R1 – R5) are also included. Beginning with the Summary Report R4, survey questions and rating scales appear differently from previous reports. In previous versions of the survey, veterans were posed questions with binary response options: “Yes” or “No.” Since 2015, the survey questions and response options have been rewritten to allow veterans to choose an appropriate response in a range of options from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” Survey questions now appear as a statement, and veterans have rated their agreement with the statement on a spectrum that spans from Strong Agreement to Strong Disagreement.

1. Ease of scheduling appointments

The reported ease of scheduling appointments at a VA facility was considerably stronger for this round of surveys; however, concerns were noted.

I was able to schedule my appointment easily.

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:				75.9%	78.3%	88.2%
No:				24.1%	21.8%	11.8%
Strongly Agree:	60.1%	47.1%	42.9%			
Mostly Agree:	20.1%	19.1%	16.1%			
Neutral:	7.6%	9.8%	13.0%			
Mostly Disagree:	4.9%	11.1%	11.0%			
Strongly Disagree	7.3%	12.8%	17.0%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this statement with 295 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they did not have a problem with scheduling their appointments at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. The veterans who indicated they were having trouble making appointments stated most of their issues were with scheduling appointments over the phone and being unable to reach VA support staff who could schedule an appointment.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“I called yesterday to set up an appointment but was never called back with a date/time. It was only when I called again yesterday that I found that my appointment was for today.”*
- *“My biggest complaint here is you get a card telling you to call and make an appointment, so you call, and after navigating through this automated telephone system, you finally reach the extension, it rings a few times - then you are sent to the department's voice mail. You leave your name and number as instructed and then you wait. After a couple of hours of waiting, you finally give up, you've got other things to do. You leave and when you get back, they returned your call and left a message for you to call again. Next day, you do the same drill again, voice mail again - so you leave your name and number again as you did yesterday. After waiting again, you leave. You return and again you've got a message to*

call again. Why can't they set up a system - when you call for an appointment, and they can't answer the phone, you are sent to a central appointment desk that can make the appointment for them? One call and it's done!."

- *"I got a follow up call in a reasonable time frame. The caller was very courteous."*

Recommendation: Continue to work on and monitor improvements to the scheduling system and ensure that Veterans can easily access Patient Advocates and Quality Management staff.

VA Medical Center's Response:

The Kansas City VA Medical Center has implemented a call center starting in December of 2016 which provides dedicated staff to answering phones coming into areas such as Primary Care, Pharmacy, and Mental Health. The premise of this call center is to improve the ease of access to scheduling, telephone triage care, and provide one call resolution. Similar to the results of the VCSP Report data, the VA has shown a dramatic improvement in Veteran satisfaction not only in ability and ease to schedule, but also in wait times, and staff courtesy. The call center is monitored and managed real time. We also implemented daily huddles to improve quality of efficiency of the call center. The senior leadership team continues to monitor call abandonment rates and speed of service data at least once a week and ensures timely response to patient concerns coming through the patient advocate reports. Calls coming into scheduling staff are currently answered on average within 20 seconds with the number of calls averaging approximately 250 per day.

2. Ease of access to the appointment location at the facility

This survey period, veterans expressed greater satisfaction with navigating the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region in order to find the location of their appointments.

I was able to find my way to my appointment easily.

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:				88.5%	91.3%	98.7%
No:				11.5%	8.7%	1.3%
Strongly Agree:	70.9%	64.0%	56.8%			
Mostly Agree:	16.8%	15.1%	18.7%			
Neutral:	7.6%	12.4%	11.0%			
Mostly Disagree:	0.8%	1.8%	4.0%			
Strongly Disagree:	3.8%	6.6%	9.5%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this statement with 323 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing they did not have a problem finding their way to appointments at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. We continue to view this as a strong sign that the VA is taking the necessary steps to help veterans navigate the VA facilities.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“Primary clinics are clearly marked and located straight ahead once you enter the building.”*
- *“They always give VERY detailed information on where you need to go.”*
- *“Signs are not that visible, because if you walk from north to south, the sign is visible walking from west to east of bldg.”*

Recommendation: Continue having greeters meet patients. Encourage all VA staff to offer assistance to patients needing directions. Make recent clinic location changes apparent on signage in the hospital and on appointment reminders.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

Wayfinding in the KCVA is a priority and the facility looks for ways to continuously improve methods to accomplish this mission. These methods include improved signage, appropriate relocation of services to logical locations, and utilization of greeters/escorts to assist visitors in locating their destinations.

3. Cleanliness of the VA facility

Veterans reported increased satisfaction in the cleanliness of the VA facilities during this survey period.

At the time of my visit, the VA facility was clean.

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:				37.2%	39.1%	49.4%
Above Average (Good):				38.3%	34.8%	39.5%
Average/Fair:				16.9%	21.7%	7.4%
Below Average:				3.8%	0.0%	2.5%
Poor:				3.8%	4.3%	1.2%”
Strongly Agree:	65.8%	56.4%	50.4%			
Mostly Agree:	21.5%	24.4%	25.4%			
Neutral:	9.2%	14.7%	15.3%			
Mostly Disagree:	1.9%	0.9%	4.3%			
Strongly Disagree:	1.6%	3.6%	4.6%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this statement with 321 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region were clean. Veterans appeared to be pleased with the work done by the maintenance and cleaning staff. Only thirteen (13) responses expressed criticism of the VA medical facility’s cleanliness.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“I see staff cleaning the hallways, etc. Even nursing staff picks up papers and trash that may be on the floor as they walk from one place to another.”*
- *“Since about 2003, I started noticing how clean maintenance has been keeping the facility. Also, I have noticed continual improvements being made to the facility. In my opinion, this facility rates above other facilities I’ve been in.”*
- *“Bathroom was disgusting. Trash in the hallway.”*

Recommendation: Continue to ensure housekeeping is monitoring high-traffic zones, such as restrooms and main entrances. Also, continue to make telephone numbers visible for veterans to call when areas need attention.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The KCVA strives to maintain a level of cleanliness that exceeds visitor’s expectations. There have been considerable efforts to improve the facilities to meet expectations for environment of care standards which includes dedicated projects to remodel and expand the main waiting areas, restrooms, and clinics.

4. Amount of time to see a provider from the date requesting the appointment

Wait times have improved sharply since the last survey period. The percentage of veterans expressing that they were seen by their provider in a reasonable amount of time is far higher than the previous report.

From the date I initially requested the appointment, I was able to be seen by my provider in a reasonable amount of time.

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:				75.5%	65.2%	90.2%
No:				24.5%	34.8%	9.8%
Strongly Agree:	56.5%	42.7%	41.8%			
Mostly Agree:	20.1%	16.8%	15.9%			
Neutral:	11.1%	16.9%	17.9%			
Mostly Disagree:	3.5%	8.4%	8.1%			
Strongly Disagree:	8.7%	15.1%	16.4%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this statement with 282 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were seen by their VA provider in a reasonable amount of time at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. In some cases, veterans reported that they had to wait longer than they thought was necessary.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“I have been going to the KC VA since 1954, and the time to see a doctor has gotten much better.”*
- *“They schedule appointments 2 or 3 weeks into the future, by which time I am not sure what my work schedule is like. Plus I need help now, not in the distant future.”*
- *“The Choice program is a great idea but is way too complicated to function smoothly. There are too many hoops to jump through to get approval for doctor consult. At present, I’ve had an MRI which has determined my hand was broken more than 10 weeks ago, but I’m waiting (more than a week) for approval to see an Orthopedic surgeon to operate and repair my dexterous hand.”*

Recommendation: Continue current efforts to ensure that staff vacancies are filled in a timely manner in order to reduce the length of time patients have to wait to see their doctor.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

KCVA continues to monitor and add additional staff as needed. We continually recruit for key vacancies. In addition, we use several clinic practice management techniques to reduce wait times and add capacity. We have improved physician productivity and efficiency significantly over the last year and are focused on growth of specialty care access using the same techniques for improvement of productivity and efficiency for mid-level providers.

KCVA provides same day access in primary care, mental health, audiology and optometry as well as assisting Veterans with obtaining timely appointments via our Care in the Community service.

5. Communication by the VA staff while the veteran was at the facility

Historically, poor communication between patients and VA personnel has been the main reason veterans and their families contact the senate office. While some veterans reported having difficulty communicating with VA staff, the data shows that an ever increasing percentage of veterans are reporting positive communication exchanges. However, there is still room for improvement with regard to communication between patients and VA medical staff.

VA staff communicated well with me and clearly explained what was going on.

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:				79.3%	60.9%	90.0%
No:				20.7%	39.1%	10.0%
Strongly Agree:	62.5%	56.0%	45.8%			
Mostly Agree:	16.3%	16.8%	18.4%			
Neutral:	8.4%	8.8%	10.7%			
Mostly Disagree:	6.3%	6.7%	9.2%			
Strongly Disagree:	6.5%	11.5%	15.9%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this statement with 290 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that the VA staff communicated effectively with them at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. Forty-seven (47) responses expressed disapproval regarding unsatisfactory communication experiences with VA staff.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“All questions and concerns addressed clearly. Plan of care explained concisely.”*
- *“My primary and her staff at the Honor Annex have an outstanding communication ethic, but when it comes to specialist departments at the main KC facility, communication is spotty. Usually I have to contact them for results/follow-up.”*
- *“Messages seem to get lost between clinic nurses, doctor and pharmacy.”*

Recommendation: Continue to improve communication best practices between departments and medical staff and patients, urging staff to listen to patient concerns and provide complete answers to their questions regarding care.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

Communication is a practice that always requires dedication and improvement to substantiate that those whom you communicate to not only are able to verify understanding but also get the information when they need it, how they need it, and the appropriate information is communicated. The KCVA is always working on ways to improve communication through process improvement techniques, utilization of the Diffusion of Excellence to utilize national best practices and continuously seeking feedback for ways to improve.

6. Receiving necessary care while at VA facility

Efficiency of care is a key indicator of strong customer service satisfaction. Accordingly, the data suggests that a large majority of veterans are pleased with the VA’s healthcare efficiency.

I was able to get the care I needed during my visit.

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Strongly Agree:	60.6%	51.6%	46.7%			
Mostly Agree:	14.1%	16.9%	11.8%			
Neutral:	10.3%	8.9%	12.1%			
Mostly Disagree:	5.2%	4.4%	7.5%			
Strongly Disagree:	9.8%	17.8%	21.9%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this statement with 275 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they received the care they needed during their visit.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“I have previously been informed if I am a call-in, I cannot be seen for anything other than what I called in about. Yet, today I was struggling with a bad cough and the doctor did listen to my lungs, although that was not my original reason for being there.”*
- *“I didn't get a full assessment until a follow on visit. Even during that visit, I didn't receive any significant advice on how to correct the deficiencies discovered during my memory tests.”*
- *“I have always received the care I came here for.”*

Recommendation: Continue current efforts to ensure that all physician/staff interactions with patients during appointments include a willingness to listen patiently to veterans’ concerns regarding their care. Ensure that sufficient time is allowed for physicians to meet with patients during visits to address concerns and answer questions regarding care.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The VA is a system predicated on improving health outcomes of patients in a manner which has been identified as a best practice and has recently started to be adopted by the private sector. The VA provides longer appointment times for patients to discuss their concerns and assist in the development of individual care plans. The VA also utilizes alternative methods to provide Veterans the opportunity to communicate with their providers to include secure messaging and MyHealtheVet online access to records.

7. Respect shown to the veteran while at the VA facility

The reported respect shown at the Kansas City VA facilities climbed higher during this survey period. More than eighty-three percent (83.7%) of the responses received reported respectful interactions between veterans and staff at the Kansas City VA facilities.

I was treated with respect while at the VA facility.

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:				82.4%	73.9%	87.3%
No:				17.6%	26.1%	12.7%
Strongly Agree:	72.0%	60.0%	53.9%			
Mostly Agree:	11.7%	15.5%	15.6%			
Neutral:	7.9%	12.0%	11.2%			
Mostly Disagree:	3.0%	3.1%	7.8%			
Strongly Disagree:	5.4%	9.3%	11.5%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this statement with 308 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were treated with respect while at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. While there were several instances where veterans reported unsatisfactory treatment by specific VA staff, there appears to be an overall culture of respect at the Kansas City VA Medical Center with some room for improvement.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"I always receive the utmost respect from the staff at the Kansas City VA."*
- *"Almost all VA personnel are professionally courteous; however, there is an occasional odd duck. I have no complaint regarding this topic."*
- *"For the actual medical staff (RN's, MD's etc.) - some of the best in the business. For the support staff (scheduling, clerks, lab techs, etc.) - some of the most rude, unprofessional, uncaring, lazy, and sometimes downright mean people I have ever come across."*

Recommendation: Continue efforts to educate all VA staff on the importance placed in *"I CARE: VA Core Values and Characteristics."* Those employees who best display *I CARE* values deserve to be properly recognized, and those employees identified as lacking should receive additional guidance.

VA Medical Center's Response:

Adhering to the ICARE values is made top priority to meet our mission at the KCVA. All employees reaffirm their commitment to the ICARE through mandatory training on annual bases as well as at the New Employee Orientation. We also recognize employees who display the ICARE values in town halls, service meetings, separate incentive awards, thank you cards and other awards on a regular basis. At the same time employees are held accountable and receive constructive feedback when their displayed behavior does not adhere to the ICARE values.

8. Willingness to recommend the VA facility to other veterans

The data suggests that veterans are now more inclined than ever to positively recommend the Kansas City region VA facilities to other veterans than previous reports indicated. Over the last three Summary Reports, willingness to recommend Kansas City VA facilities has grown from 59.7% (R4) to 67.6% (R5) to its current high of 80.2% (R6).

I would recommend this VA facility to other veterans.

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:				77.5%	63.6%	93.4%
No:				22.5%	36.4%	6.6%
Strongly Agree:	62.5%	53.4%	44.4%			
Mostly Agree:	17.7%	14.2%	15.3%			
Neutral:	8.4%	14.6%	18.4%			
Mostly Disagree:	4.3%	5.3%	9.8%			
Strongly Disagree:	7.1%	12.4%	12.1%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this statement with 295 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they would recommend the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region to other veterans. However, concerns were noted.

Below are sample positive comments from veterans:

- *"I recommend it to vets that are not in the system all the time."*
- *"I receive 100% of all my care with VA. They are knowledgeable, competent, and aware of the needs of veterans with complex medical conditions related to their service. A local GP would not be able to coordinate that care easily nor have the resources available. Veterans must continue to have the VA available to them."*
- *"Everyone at this hospital is extremely friendly and helpful. They even invited my husband to have lunch with them while I was in surgery."*

Below are sample concerns from veterans:

- *"The women's clinic is in desperate need of having the ability to do mammograms and/or biopsies. I still cannot understand why it is called "women's center, but lacking the most important part of a woman."*
- *"Overall I have gotten good care at the Kansas City VA Hospital. The staff is overworked and has too many patients without enough providers. Finding parking is sometimes an issue."*
- *"I recommend b/c you really only have 2 choices in the KC Metro area either the KC location or the Leavenworth, and if you're a Vet you need to at least get started at one of those. I hesitate at times recommending b/c of the negative experiences with the support*

staff. Typically I take the person directly to the VFW/Legion/DAV Service Officer and bypass the "welcome desk."

Recommendation: Continue present efforts that give quality of care and customer service priority of place in the Kansas City VA Healthcare System.

VA Medical Center's Response:

The VA has demonstrated an improved commitment to providing local facilities the resources needed to provide Veterans the care they deserve through the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act. The KCVA has increased staffing by more than 35% over the past 3 years and provides Veterans the choice of selecting care at the VA or in the community based on availability of services. Providing services in a high-quality manner is not the only aspect the KCVA is concentrating on improving, but also the environment where that care is provided has been a major focus. Over the past 2 years, the KCVA has renovated more than 60,000 square feet of space and has built new Outpatient clinics in Warrensburg, Belton, and are currently building a new clinic in Johnson County KS.

9. Overall experience with your personal doctor or nurse

A veteran's confidence in his/her personal doctor or nurse is key to evaluating overall customer service experience. Since the last report, veterans' satisfaction with their physician or nurse has noticeably increased.

How would you rate your overall experience with your personal doctor or nurse?

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:	58.2%	54.2%	46.7%			
Above Average (Good):	20.1%	17.7%	16.1%			
Average/Fair:	11.7%	12.9%	16.4%			
Below Average:	4.1%	3.6%	9.5%			
Poor:	6.0%	10.7%	11.2%			

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this question with 288 indicating that their experience with their personal doctor or nurse at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region was "Excellent" or "Above Average." Thirty-seven (37) respondents rated their overall experience with their personal doctor/nurse as either "Below Average" or "Poor."

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"I'm never rushed and never kept waiting for long. Doctors and nurses really care and are patient and knowledgeable regarding my questions."*

- *“My primary and her staff are excellent and professional, but it seems they might be overwhelmed. Visits are hurried and not as thorough as could be.”*
- *“I have four doctors I work with regularly. One is outstanding! Two are good, and one is a bit unorthodox but okay. The nurses tend to be nice and caring but again because of the volume of patients, sometimes you feel like a number because they finish with you quickly so they can move on to the next patient.”*

Recommendation: Continue to implement the recommendations of the veterans’ advisory group, the Veterans’ Customer Satisfaction Program and VA Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) surveys to improve customer service and quality of care at all VA facilities.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The KCVA is working to improve experiences with doctors and nurses by providing additional staffing directly in those areas to improve encounters and meeting Veteran expectations. As the data presents, most Veterans are happy with their providers; and we strive to meet or Veterans’ expectations every time they choose the VA.

10. Overall experience at the VA facility

Since the last report, satisfaction with veterans’ overall experience at Kansas City VA facilities has risen solidly. The VA Medical Center’s continued focus on respect and communication through the “I-CARE” Program appears to be improving veterans’ overall experiences.

How would you rate your overall experience with the VA Medical Centers?

	R6 (current)	R5	R4	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:	47.8%	42.7%	34.9%	37.7%	22.7%	48.7%
Above Average (Good):	23.4%	22.2%	22.5%	28.7%	31.8%	34.2%
Average/Fair:	16.3%	16.9%	16.1%	13.5%	18.2%	14.5%
Below Average:	5.7%	7.1%	12.4%	7.0%	9.1%	0.0%
Poor:	6.8%	11.1%	14.1%	13.1%	18.2%	2.6%

Three hundred sixty-eight (368) responses were received to this question with 262 indicating that their overall experience at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region was “Excellent” or “Above Average.” Forty-six (46) respondents rated their overall experience at the VA medical facility as either “Below Average” or “Poor.”

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“The KCVA Med Center personnel knew me as Kevin for 17 years and have now known me as Karen for 18 1/2 years and I have been accepted there and treated very fairly. The KCVA Med Center should be used as a model for all hospitals in the veteran's hospital system because they put professionalism ahead of anything else. They do not discriminate.*

They have treated me with respect when I transitioned from Kevin to Karen. I only have praise for the KCVA Med Ctr.”

- *“I owe my life to the VA system and my wife. I am an Agent Orange Vietnam veteran and a Camp Jejunee water contamination veteran who suffered an artillery blast TBI injury in Vietnam while serving as Marine artillery there. Add PTSD into this mix and you can see why the VA is so necessary in my life. Now think about all the veterans that have followed in my footsteps (like my step-daughter, her husband (Desert Storm era) and grandson (Iraqi Freedom and Afghanistan wars) and you get the scope of the need for the VA.”*
- *“Everyone has areas to improve on. I would say our KC VA is one of the best facilities in the US. They are just overwhelmed with patients, and the facility isn't large enough for the amount of patients they have. They are a great bunch of people and do their very best.”*

Recommendation: Continue to implement the recommendations of the veterans’ advisory group, the Veterans’ Customer Satisfaction Program and VA Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) surveys to improve customer service and quality of care at all VA facilities.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The KCVA feels every Veteran deserves to receive care at the VA and believes it is a unique and special place for Veterans compared to the private sector. A large portion of our staff are Veterans themselves and this truly provides an environment where Veterans feel welcome and understood. The KCVA has assigned workgroups to focus on improving Veteran satisfaction and continues to focus on this aspect of care in our strategic plan.



VETERANS' RECOMMENDATIONS

The current Summary Report discloses various issues regarding the customer service received by veterans and other matters as presented below. This section summarizes the recommendations that veterans have made to improve the VA facility they visited. Most of the recommendations from veterans referenced the same issues outlined throughout this report.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"Better parking."*
- *"Getting from the parking lot to the hospital. They have shuttles, but they are so erratic and unpredictable, you never know. Last time, I had to wait almost 20 minutes, almost missed my appointment. Saw only one shuttle making the rounds. Other times they've got 4 or 5 shuttles running at a time. They were there before you can even get out of the car. Last winter, I waited over an hour before I finally gave up and walked, and with spinal stenosis, that's not easy. I think they need smaller vehicles for shuttles, rather than those small buses that are cumbersome driving around the parking lots. Something that will carry 4 or 5 patients at a time. The times I have ridden the shuttle, only a couple of times have I seen more than 5 people riding a shuttle at one time. Most of the time it's just 1 or 2 riders. The drivers would be able to get around quicker (more rounds), and it would be more economical. The patients would not have to wait as long, coming or going, and it would be more environmentally friendly, and probably cheaper to maintain."*
- *"Administration section needs to be as good as the Medical and Nursing side."*
- *"Add a feature to the phone system where I can bypass the 3rd party phone bank and talk directly with my primary team."*
- *"The ER needs improvement. There was a WWII veteran waiting that could not breathe well and he had to wait 3 hours to be seen. Another veteran was ill and could not even sit in his chair and ended up on the floor. My mother tried to get the ER people to help and they told her that he needed to wait his turn. It was not until an admin saw me recording it with my phone that help was then summoned."*
- *"Provide an easier method of referral to make an appointment with Pain Management, Orthopedics, or any of the specialty clinics. If not, make it easier to use the Choice card out on the economy. The docs I see are grossly overworked but they keep on plugging and do the best they can."*
- *"The reception area and the area outside the pharmacy is always crowded with folks. It would be nice if those folks had more space and a more comfortable area to wait in."*



RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONALISM OF VA EMPLOYEES BY VETERANS

Is there a provider or a department that does an excellent job that you would like Senator McCaskill to know about?

There are many great professionals working in the Kansas City region's VA medical facilities, and it is important to acknowledge them for their hard work and commitment to service. One hundred seventy-three (173) responses were received to this question acknowledging veterans' appreciation for a provider or a department at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region.

Below are sample responses from veterans. At the request of the VA, employees' names were replaced with their initials to protect their privacy. All responses, in full, were provided to the VA Administration to alert them to employees who were singled out for their professionalism and performance:

- *"Dr. A. W. in the Eye Clinic is WONDERFUL."*
- *"Green team, Dr. V is just a great Doctor. She will take all the time needed at each visit to answer all questions and concerns. She ensures my health is the upmost priority."*
- *"Everyone here is great. I think C's job, (the receptionist) can get hectic at times; and she does a great job and handles it well."*
- *"N. A. She is always nice even when I'm not a model patient."*
- *"S. Y. and the PTSD Clinic at the Honor Annex PTSD Clinic. She has been so helpful to so many veterans suffering from PTSD. She has gone above and beyond her duties and responsibilities to honestly take care of veterans with love and care. She really needs to be recognized in front of her peers and staff so as to set an example for all to emulate."*
- *"Women's Clinic: D. W. MD, K. J. RN, K.S.LPN, S.G. AMSA."*
- *"KCVA Mental/Behavioral Health - Dr. J. B. and Dr. J. D. Incredible practitioners who make a difference with exceptional care, superb talent, and a remarkable attitude of caring."*
- *"I highly recommend the Kansas City Honor Annex. We see providers Dr. N, D and D, but we have had excellent visits in all departments in the entire Annex. It is always clean, always easy to schedule, they always call us if any scheduling changes or they make appointments or reschedule appointments, the lab has been good, x-ray it has been excellent. They all go above and beyond what they need to, to make sure we are taken care of and happy patients."*

- *“There are many unsung heroes at all VA Facilities. The personnel do not equal their situation. Their professionalism is often unmentioned and unrewarded because the focus is on situations which are beyond their control, such as veteran wait times for care. My primary care doctor and her staff are very professional and need mention. Dr. A. S., VA Honor Annex, Kansas City, MO.”*
- *“J. R. in the X-Ray department is an absolutely refreshing personality there. It’s always awkward to have to strip down for x-rays; but she is professional and always has a great attitude. I also love the constant education she gives on what she is doing and why.”*
- *“I have nothing but good to say about all of the staff at the Belton CBOC; they are among the best. The GI Department at the KCMO VA Medical Center does a great job.”*
- *“I cannot give just one answer. But Dr. T, PTSD psychiatrist has been most supportive. Primary care with S. Y. C. is outstanding. Dermatology leads all others in other medical centers. Pulmonary just lost a doctor that I wish had stayed, Dr. D, but another organization made her a better offer. In Orthopedics there is a RNP.”*
- *“Veterans Transportation Service, they handle a complex operation with good people who make the vets feel appreciated. One concierge, nicknamed Dr. P, is a saint in disguise, nothing is too much for him to do for the patients or their families. He gets them into and out of cars and makes sure they get to the place they need to go taking them there himself if needed. This is especially challenging during the construction, but he takes it all in stride. In addition to keeping traffic flowing, and wheel chairs available. Also meets the Annex shuttle every 30 minutes to take lab work packages to the labs or get return materials.”*
- *“R (my mental health counselor) is very, very good. She listens to me and helps me deal with my PTSD. I have made some progress with her help. Doctors W, M, and F (KCVA Hospital) are truly caring doctors. They speak to me in a way I can understand exactly what they are doing and offer reasonable expectation of care. They allow me to be involved in the decisions. I have had multiple surgeries and procedures and in each case I knew exactly what they were going to do and the hoped for result. The results were not always what I wanted them to be but at least I knew the odds.”*

Recommendation: The men and women of the Kansas City VA Healthcare System provide superior levels of care for our nation’s veterans. Their dedication, compassion, and professionalism deserve our praise and respect; efforts should continue to recognize those who best represent the Kansas City VA Healthcare System.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

KCVA appreciates compliments getting communicated to the facility leadership so that employees can be recognized. Employees working at the VA select this facility as the employer of choice for many reasons, but the most common reason is to serve our Veterans; the facility strives to give positive feedback reinforcing the good work being accomplished.



FOLLOW UP ON VA MEDICAL CENTER'S RESPONSES

Since the first Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the Kansas City VA Medical Center agreed to act on a number of the recommendations outlined in the previous reports, or they were already taking action on some of the concerns mentioned in the summary. This section reports the status of the implementation of those commitments.

Ease of scheduling appointments

In the fifth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center stated:

Improvement initiatives include the following:

The MyVA Access Initiative is being implemented throughout Kansas City VA Medical Center (KCVAMC). The primary focus of this effort is to create a more patient-centered scheduling process. It is designed to engage Veterans more directly by (a) offering appointments and follow-up options upon leaving the clinic, if preferred; (b) giving opportunity to make appointments on a face-to-face basis; (c) allowing Veterans to choose an appointment convenient to them, rather than being assigned a date and time.

As part of the MyVA Access Initiative, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) will begin the roll out of a new scheduling package referred to as the VISTA Scheduling Enhancement project. We are scheduled for our initial overview of the new product in June, 2016.

The use of text messaging is being explored as an option for scheduling appointments as well.

AudioCare, the postcard and telephone reminder systems, is used to generate reminders to Veterans for upcoming appointments. Contact information for scheduling issues along with date, time, and location of the appointment is included in the communication.

A multi-disciplinary telephone improvement team has been established as well with the goal to develop processes for first call resolution. Leadership from key areas are implementing best practices and allocating resources to improve the overall call efficiency. Examples of efforts include the following:

- A new automated callback system called "QWorks" is being piloted in some of the clinical and administrative areas. The system places calls in a queue that are then automatically distributed to staff as staff becomes available, thereby eliminating the need to Veterans to be place on hold for long periods of time. It allows staff to personally call every Veteran who has called into the line.*

- *Reports produced through the automated call distribution (ACD) system are monitored weekly. Feedback from correlated data associated with abandonment rates, calls in the queue, hold time, average speed of answer, and an overall grade of service is provided to each location in an effort to improve telephone access.*

Finally, the number of Patient Advocates recently was increased from two to three. Patient Advocate phone activity is monitored daily with work assignments adjusted accordingly. The Patient Advocates are located in the Quality, Safety, and Value Service line. When there is a concern regarding the quality of care provided, the concern is immediately forwarded to the appropriate personnel to review the issue and take appropriate action.

What is the current status of these initiatives aimed at improving the scheduling system for veterans?

VA Medical Center's Response:

The MyVA Access initiatives have been rolled out and access for almost all services in the VA meet or exceed private sector standards, and are scheduled based off of the patient's preference and their current health care needs. The KCVA continues to strive to get patients scheduled for follow up visits while they are seeing a provider or prior to leaving the VA and reminders are provided to Veterans when their next appointment is coming up via multiple methods to include a mailed postcard indicating the time, date, and location of their next appointment as well as a follow up call reminding them of their appointment the day before they are due for their appointment.

The implementation of AudioCare has been rolled out, and as one benefit of this new system, the VA is able to track real-time customer satisfaction and address any needs patients may have regarding any roadblocks or issues that may have arisen. In conjunction with this rollout, the telephone improvement team has assisted in standing up a call center for primary care, scheduling, pharmacy, and mental health which has streamlined services for Veterans. This streamlining has improved speed to answer, abandonment rates, and first call resolution. This data is all tracked through the ACD system and is monitored real time as well as reported weekly to facility leadership.

Amount of time to see a provider from the date requesting the appointment

In the fifth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center stated:

A group practice management structure that incorporates lean management principles to improve clinic access is now being utilized. This has resulted in the development of teams that have a strategic focus on a single issue to improve access. During the timeframe from January, 2016 to March, 2016:

- *Telephone access has improved;*

- *New teams to answer phones were implemented resulting in an increased call volume by approximately 2000 calls;*
- *Call abandonment rates were reduced from 21.1% to 14.3%; and*
- *Speed of response has decreased from 207 seconds to 97 seconds.*

Other improvement activities include:

The Group Practice Manager and Lean Manager are methodically reviewing clinics' present access data and meeting frequently to pilot new changes and improve productivity and efficiency. The focused clinic reviews "helps develop access slots" and "educates" specialty sections on best practices. For example, Orthopedics increased 30 patient appointment slots per week and Neurology improved productivity and added 15 patient appointment slots per week.

Primary Care has (a) started holding monthly Saturday clinics; (b) added float providers to prevent clinical cancellations; (c) begun using gap fee basis providers; and (d) implemented patient inability to appoint (PITA), a new process to ensure no patients are scheduled out greater than 30 days from their preferred date.

Mental Health has (a) implemented "Open access" for our Substance Use Disorder (SUD) provider for same day appointments, (b) performed scheduling audits and process improvements to reduce the number of missed appointments for peer support specialists, and (c) focused and improved the Primary Care Mental Health Integration consult process related to Veteran needs.

A MyVA Access declaration was held on April 26, 2016 where employees reaffirmed their commitment to improving access for our Veterans through national information sharing, innovation diffusion, and project development.

Work continues with community partners to give Veterans a choice for care if wait times exceed desired timelines.

In addition, Human Resources is tracking speed of hire (60 days to tentative job offer) as well as utilizing the following:

- *30 Medical Support Assistant (MSA) hiring model;*
- *Enhanced Physician Recruitment Model;*
- *Tracking monthly measures which follow recruitment of critical positions until all identified positions are filled;*
- *100 day project to review and remove any unnecessary steps in the on-boarding process;*
- *Yellow Belt (lean) Project that focuses on reducing the number of days to establish an enter on duty date for Registered Nurses (RNs).*

Finally, the recruitment request submission system was redesigned reducing the turnaround time for review of recruitment request from 14 days to 2.

What does the Kansas City VA's internal current data indicate as the average amount of time it takes for patients to be seen by a provider?

VA Medical Center's Response:

Current Average wait times for the KCVA is 1.76 days for primary care, 3.10 days for specialty care, and 2.10 days for mental health care. Although this information is for average wait times, patients are still able to get same day access for Primary care, mental health, audiology, and optometry.



CONCLUSION

The Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program in the Kansas City region is making progress with regard to customer service at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. This summary report details ways the VA can improve veterans' experiences at the VA medical facilities, and highlights the steps the VA is taking to continue improving veterans' experience at the VA medical center in the Kansas City region. The veterans who filled out the survey provided honest, constructive information regarding their experiences at the VA medical facilities during their recent visits. With this information, we compiled a summary report that reflects veterans' experiences and concerns at these facilities.

The VA's Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients report provides the VA with a general overview of veterans' overall quality of care. Alternatively, the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey provides the VA with some specific examples of the quality of the veterans' experiences at the Kansas City region VA facilities.

It is clear from the surveys that there is always room to improve veterans' experiences at the Kansas City region VA Medical Center. However, based on the feedback from veterans, it appears that veterans are largely satisfied with the Kansas City VA's communication practices, clean environment and culture of respect. Also, they seem especially pleased with the VA's process for scheduling appointments and attention to maintaining reasonable wait times to see a provider. These strong gains in satisfaction across multiple categories may explain why Kansas City veterans are now more inclined than ever to positively recommend their VA to other veterans.

In order to maintain this momentum, we need to continue to work together to identify areas of concern at the VA medical centers, to address the issues and to improve the quality of service that we provide to our veterans.

We encourage our veterans to continue filling out the surveys as their participation in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program is critical to the success of the program. The senate office will compile the summary reports and the VA Medical Center's responses on an annual basis.

Special thanks to the members of various veterans' service organizations who assisted in the development and completion of the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program: Roland Norris, Philip Hafler, Randy Barnett and Bob Larkin.